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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: TUNISIAN PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES

REFLECTS ON REFORMS WITHIN THE PARLIAMENT

REF: 2009 TUNIS 834

Classified By: Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

[¶1.](#) (C) Fouad M'Bazaa, President of the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies, told the Ambassador January 8 that the Chamber will establish a new Tunisia-U.S. Caucus, probably in February. They discussed the evolution of the Parliament from a one party to a multi-party body over M'Bazaa's 12 year tenure and its interactions with the Council of Advisors and government ministries. M'Bazaa, re-appointed for the third time as President of Chamber following the October 2009 elections, was open and relaxed during the meeting. End summary.

Parliament's Evolution

[¶2.](#) (C) During his January 8 courtesy call, the Ambassador asked M'Bazaa for his views on how the Parliament has evolved over the last 12 years. M'Bazaa did not try to brush over the Parliament's restricted role but said some progress had been made. He focused on the fact that the Chamber used to consist of only one party and that now, with other parties present, there was at least a limited exchange of political views. The Chamber had increased its transparency by allowing some sessions to be televised. He also noted that the Parliament has started to interact more directly with the government through the establishment of a forum where the Deputies could meet with Ministers and ask about the government's performance. He added that not all of the questions were sent to the Ministers in advance. (Comment: Two of the most outspoken Deputies were not allowed to run in the October elections. End comment.) He also noted that women were increasing their influence in the Parliament as their numbers grew; they now make up 26 percent of the Deputies.

[¶3.](#) (C) The Ambassador asked about the working relationship between the two houses, the Chamber of Deputies and the Council of Advisors. M'Bazaa said the Chamber receives legislation from the government and reviews it, sometimes suggesting changes before passing it to the Council of Advisors. If the Council, which is one-third elected and two-thirds appointed, has additional changes or does not agree with the Chamber, a smaller committee is established to discuss the issues and reach an agreement. If an agreement cannot be reached, according to M'Bazaa, the Chamber, as the only wholly elected body, has precedence over the Council.

[¶4.](#) (SBU) The Ambassador asked if a new Tunisia-U.S. caucus would be established after the elections. M'Bazaa thanked the U.S. Representatives for their strong support of Tunisia and said a new caucus would no doubt be formed, possibly as

early as February.

Biographic Information

15. (C) M'Bazaa is one of the few Tunisian politicians who has served in senior positions under both President Ben Ali and President Habib Bourguiba. Under Bourguiba he was Director of National Security (1965-67), Minister of Youth and Sports (1973-78), Minister of Health (1978), Minister of Information and Cultural Affairs (1979-81), and Ambassador to Morocco (1986). Under President Ben Ali he was Minister of Youth and Sport (1987-88). From 1988-93 he was a member of the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) Central Committee but did not hold a ministerial position. In 1995 he was re-elected to Parliament, having been a member in 1964-65 and 1974-79. He was elected President of the Chamber in 1997. After the October 2009 elections there were indications that First Lady Leila Trabelsi wanted to replace M'Bazaa as President with Hedi Djilani, whose daughters are married into both the Trabelsi and Ben Ali families. President Ben Ali however, chose to keep M'Bazaa (reftel). Of all his positions, M'Bazaa specifically pointed out to the Ambassador that he had been Bourguiba's Director of National Security in 1965-67.

GRAY